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RUEHMO/AMEMBASSY MOSCOW PRIORITY 9096
RUEHKO/AMEMBASSY TOKYO PRIORITY 5101
RUEHSH/AMCONSUL SHENYANG PRIORITY 3863
RHMFSS/COMUSKOREA J5 SEOUL KOR PRIORITY
RUACAAA/COMUSKOREA INTEL SEOUL KOR PRIORITY
RHMFSS/COMUSFK SEOUL KOR PRIORITY
RHHMUNA/CDR USPACOM HONOLULU HI PRIORITY

C O N F I D E N T I A L SEOUL 002285

SIPDIS

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TAGS: PROP PREL KS KN
SUBJECT: ANTI-DPRK LEAFLET DROPPING WILL CONTINUE, VOWS NGO

REF: A. SEOUL 002282
1B. SEOUL 002178

Classified By: POL M/C Joseph Yun. Reasons 1.4 (b/d).

11. (C) Summary: On November 26, POL M/C met with Fighters For Free North Korea Chair Park Hak-Sang, responsible for sending anti-DPRK leaflets, triggering mounting tensions in South-North relations. Park said he was facing increasing pressure to stop, including the Ministry of Unification and fellow NGOs, but was determined to carry on. The next batch of leaflets, or "balloon postcards," as Park called them, could be sent as early as December 1 near Panmunjom, pending wind conditions. Funding was the biggest concern, Park said, as his organization does not receive government or big-ticket private donations. Park confided that he believed the ROKG is using his organization as a tool, because the government has not shut down Park's NGO, even though it could do so "anytime, if they really wanted to." As the son of Pyongyang elite, Park had a bright future in North Korea, but was forced to defect in 1999, when his father, who worked for a DPRK intelligence agency, ran afoul of the authorities. Park married another defector, a former DPRK Army officer, in 2001, after meeting her through an introduction by NIS, the South Korean spy agency. End Summary.

Pressure from MOU, but Renewed Support From Public

12. (C) Pol M/C met November 26 with Fighters For Free North Korea Chair Park Sang-hak, now at the center of the deteriorating South-North relations because his leaflet activities. Park said that he had come under intense pressure to stop sending leaflets, especially from the Ministry of Unification, but also from civic groups and church organizations. As a result, he announced through a November 22 press conference he would suspend leafleting for 3 months. However, within hours, Pyongyang announced new measures restricting border access, including stopping Kaesong City Tours and, stopping rail services and restricting access to Kaesong Industrial Complex (Ref A). It was therefore, easy for him to reverse the earlier decision, which he did on November 24.

13. (C) The next launch, planned from near Panmunjom, could be as early as December 1 or 2, depending on the wind. So far, Park has collected 700 USD worth of one-dollar bills and Chinese five-Yuan notes. Park confided that if the government really wanted to shut his NGO down, they could, but a lack of ROKG effort to stop his activities served as a proof to him that the ROKG is in fact supportive of his activities. Park also believed that the ROKG was using him

as a tool because "they don't have any other tool at this time." Park said that his support among conservative groups had increased substantially since November 24, when he decided to continue the activities.

Lack of Funding

¶4. (C) Park said that lack of funding was the biggest challenge. The effectiveness of his leaflets was obvious from Pyongyang's reaction, he said. The leaflets were having an enormous effect in educating -- and destabilizing -- the North. In contrast radio broadcasts had limited impact, yet, NGOs and government groups continued to fund them, while his activities were ignored.

¶5. (C) Park recounted that Fighters For Free North Korea had been given approximately USD 85,000 a year from the National Endowment for Democracy (NED) in the past, but this was cut off after an egg throwing incident two years ago. (NOTE: Then-Chairman of the National Assembly Intelligence Committee and a former intelligence officer Chung Hyung-keun, who was responsible for sending spies to North Korea for a number of years, proposed a change of the National security law in July ¶2006. ROK conservative groups opposed this proposal. Park was the alleged angry egg thrower. END NOTE.) Park did not see how this served as material for cutting off aid, since he was never prosecuted for this incident. Park said that he met with NED to explain the situation, but no avail to date.

¶6. (C) Turning to the costs of leafleting, Park said that about USD 5,000 could send one balloon-full of anti-DPRK leaflets, or around 300,000 "balloon postcards" as he renamed them recently. Leaflets with cash attached would cost more, he added. Usually, he attaches USD 1 bill to one in 200 leaflets. Park said that he heard from a relative in North Korea that the leaflets with USD 1 bills dropped in the southwest part of North Korea became known around the DPRK-Chinese border quickly, with locals searching everywhere for the leaflets. One dollar exchange at black market was equivalent to a month wage. Authorities also caught on too, because those changing one dollar bills were getting into trouble. So, Park now plans to use in the leaflets NKwon 5,000 bills, which he could get easily from the Chinese-North Korea border areas.

Personal History

¶7. (C) Park's father was a high ranking DPRK intelligence officer responsible for sending agents to South Korea. In 1997, many agents betrayed the organization, leading to a huge purge. About that time, Park was working in the Central Youth Propaganda Committee in Pyongyang. As a member of the Pyongyang elite, Park had graduated from the Kim Il-sung University and Kim Chaek Technical University and had a bright future ahead of him, when he was contacted by his father, who was then stationed in Japan. Facing an imminent purge, Park had no choice but to flee to China. Park, his mother and two younger siblings crossed the Yalu River and flew into South Korea through Beijing in 1999. Park later learned that his extended family members, including young nieces and nephews, died after an interrogation regarding Park's whereabouts. Park married another defector, a former DPRK military officer whom he met through the ROK National Intelligence Service, and they have a six-year-old child.

¶8. (C) Park and his six immediate family members, also defectors, make up 70 percent of the Fighters For Free North Korea staff. Until recently, three NGOs used to send leaflets to North Korea: Park's Fighters For Free North Korea, the Organization for South-North Family Reunions, and a Christian organization. The Christian organization stopped all leafleting activities in October after public criticism. The family reunion group is still hanging on, but with no real contribution. Hence, Park's organization serves as the

sole organization responsible for sending leaflets to North Korea for the time being, and his efforts remain in the spotlight.

Comment

19. (C) Propaganda warfare between the two Koreas is as old as the division of the Peninsula, and sending balloons with leaflets, and sometimes with light-weight radios, is just as old. Yet, we cannot recall any other propaganda tool that has bothered Pyongyang as much as Park's shoestring operation. Quite simple in design, Park's leaflets are different in that they are informational; previous leaflets tended to be either religious or a call to overthrow the regime. For example, Park's most recent leaflets detail Kim Jong-il's health, and his family tree, including Kim Jong-il's various wives, mistresses and their children. The other key difference is, of course, attaching to the leaflet USD 1 dollar bill or small Chinese notes. With this innovation, Park has made sure that North Koreans look for the leaflets, because they have an enormous value.

STEPHENS